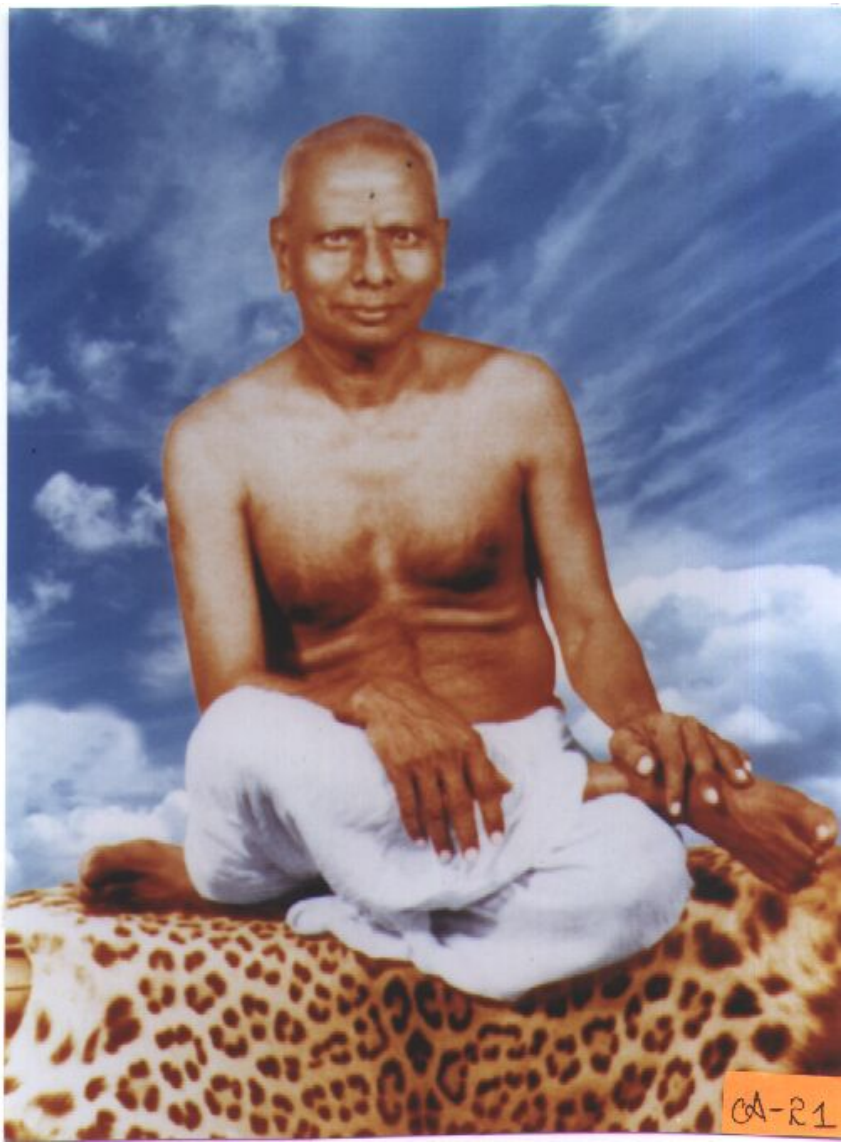


DOWN MEMORY LANE

WITH NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ

Shashikant Dattatray Chawathe

The purpose of this article is not to talk about the philosophy that Shri Nisargadatta maharaj preached in his sermons, but to revisit the sweet memories which I have of him as his disciple during my young age. I have also included in this article a few of his photographs for the readers' benefit.

Finally , I must say that I see myself as one of the privileged disciples who were fortunate to see Maharaj in his worldly form and benefit from his gems of sermons.

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I was a fifteen year boy and a high-school student in the year 1954 when I was fortunate enough to visit the modest dwelling place of Maharaj at 10th Khetwadi in Girgaon, Mumbai, and go up the steps of a small ladderlike staircase to the mezzanine floor where disciples used to gather to listen to sermons of Maharaj and also to sing devotional prayers to the accompaniment of brass percussion ' taals'. My father Shri Dattatray Gokulnath Chawathe was already a disciple of Maharaj and on an auspicious day he took me to the above sacred place. After this, it became my routine activity to visit this place mostly on Sundays and touch the lotus feet of Maharaj with my forehead.

There used to be a morning session and an evening session at the above place. In the morning session, Maharaj used to offer puja before the photographs of his Guru shri Siddha Rameshwar Maharaj and other deities. A disciple used to chant from the sacred book such as Dasbodha and other disciples used to perform 'Dhyana' sitting in 'Sahajasana'with their eyes focused on the tip of their noses chanting the Guru Mantra without moving their lips and without producing any sound. After about one hour of this 'Dhyana' exercise, there used to be singing of devotional prayers.

The evening session used to be a sermon session. A disciple used to chant a couple of lines from the sacred book such as Eknathi Bhagwat and Maharaj used to go into the detailed analysis of the meaning of these lines. He used to go well beyond the apparent meaning and bring out various hidden shades and the intricate inner beauty of the significance of the lines in the sacred book. This was very far from the bookish understanding a casual reader of sacred books may have. Other lines from the sacred book would then follow and and Maharaj would go over them offering explanations not heard by the disciples so far from any other sources. After the sermon, there used to be devotional prayers.

I used to attend mostly evening session on Sundays. Occasionally I used to attend morning session. My father when present used to be the disciple whom Maharaj chose to chant from the sacred books in the morning session or evening session when Maharaj used to give sermons. My father had a melodious voice and Maharaj was happy asking him to chant from the sacred books. Once when I was attending the evening session, Maharaj was in the mood of experimenting and to my surprise he asked me to chant from Eknathi Bhagwat while he gave the sermon. I probably did a good job. From that day onwards, maharaj always used to ask me to chant from the sacred books whenever I was present even though my father was also available. This delighted my father to no end.

Here I must record a very touching and and significant fact about Maharaj. His conviction of the eternal truth of the phrase ‘Tattwamsi”

(You are that) was so strong that in the morning session, he used to touch the feet of the disciple before asking him to chant from the sacred books. This was the perfect example of the humility of Maharaj. This most of the times embarrassed the disciple.

And then on a bright sunny morning on a Sunday, Maharaj thought me fit for being his official disciple by gifting me the Gurumantra. While I was chanting from Eknathi Bhagwat, Maharaj interrupted me and I accompanied him to the ground floor room where He asked me to sit in a Sahajasan position with my gaze concentrating on the tip of my nose. Then he very slowly uttered the Gurumantra. He ensured that I have heard the Mantra clearly and left me in that Sahajasan position performing Dhyan, the Mantra reverberating in me soundless with every breath. I do not remember the exact date of this incident. Probably it was in the year 1957 but the Mantra became part of my personality permanently thereafter.

We were fortunate to have Maharaj holding a full evening session at our 10 ft x 10 ft room at Kakadwadi, Girgaon, Mumbai. He repeated this again after one year.

Maharaj never asked any disciple to shun his worldly responsibilities. He expected his disciples to do justice to these responsibilities without mentally getting involved in them like the dew drops on a lotus leaf where the drops do not stick to the leaf. After the morning prayer session, he used to attend to his small shop which stocked products such as betel leaves, betel nuts, tobacco, cigarettes etc. Sometimes,

some of us used to be present there observing him selling these goods nonchalantly to customers who had no idea about his greatness.

In 1963, I graduated in Civil Engineering from V. J. T. Institute, Mumbai. My father and mother had educated me by sacrificing their worldly comforts. Maharaj appreciated this very much. He and shri Bhainath Maharaj decided to felicitate me on this occasion. In an evening session I was gifted an envelope with some cash and terylene shirt and pant pieces. Terylene was in vogue at that time. I normally wore cotton ware. But this was my first set of terylene clothes.

Due to some reasons there was a long time gap and I could not visit Maharaj for a long time. Then on a certain day, myself and my father attended the evening session. I found great solace in again touching his feet with my forehead. It was already too late then. Maharaj was suffering from the ailment which was not curable. Maharaj appeared to become very sentimental. Tears welled up in our eyes. Pointing a finger at me he said to disciples “See I had told this boy , Cars will queue up at the gate of your house”

This is when I saw Maharaj for the last time. I was out of Mumbai when he passed away and I could not attend the funeral.

Have I lost Maharaj? No , The Gurumantra has become a permanent organ of my body and I always have this conviction of Maharaj being always there for me.



First from left : My father D. G. chawathe



First from right : Myself

Second from right : My father D. G. Chawathe

Second from Left : My mother Lakshmibai Chawathe

First and third from left : My siblings



My siblings on both sides



Second row from bottom, Third from right: Shri Bhainath Maharaj

Third row from bottom, Second from right: My father



Function at Mumbai, fourth from right: My mother



Maharaj gifted his personal tobacco box to my father .



Maharaj gifted his personal Cymbals (Taal) to my father.



Closer view of Taal with the name of Maharaj inscribed.